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MIKE SHAYNE

MYSTERY MAGAZINE

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NEW MIKE SHAYNE SHORT NOVEL

MURDER BY THE BAY

By BRETT HALLIDAY

Was it a gang killing or the work of smugglers? Either way, the redheaded Miami detective was caught in the middle, the target of both! 5

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The Alphabet Murders

by JACK RITCHIE

The first victim had the letter A lipsticked across his forehead. The second one had the letter B. The murderer had a perfectly good series going for him. Why did he also resort to nursery rimes in the killing of his victims?

THE FIRST BODY was that of a derelict.

We studied the deceased in the light of our flashlights.

Ralph said, "I wonder why he's got that capital letter, A on his forehead in lipstick."

I straightened up. "We must not so readily assume that it is the letter A, Ralph. It could also be the crude representation of an arrow-head."

He looked again. "Why arrow-head?"

"Ralph, observe the raven-black hair of the victim. The ebony eyes. The general dark cast of features. That Amerind dignity even in death. Would that not suggest to you Menominee,

or possibly Potawatomi?"

I turned to one of the uniformed officers who had preceded our arrival. "Has the victim been identified?"

He nodded. "According to his wallet and the people around here who knew him, he was Casimir Kaminski Wisniewski."

"Well, I said, putting the past behind, "does anyone have an explanation for the capital letter A stenciled upon this unfortunate man's forehead?"

No one had.

The victim had died in a sitting position in the recess of a doorway. An empty pint whisky bottle in a paper bag lay beside him.

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coroner's office said, "Just one blow. And from the looks of the groove in his skull, I'd say it was caused by something like a narrow iron bar."

The weapon which had dispatched Wisniewski had not been found.

The uniformed officer had more information. "According to the barkeep next door, Wisniewski came into his place at about eight this evening and bought a pint of whiskey. Then he left. Wisniewski wasn't much of a social drinker. He liked to go off and drink the bottle all by himself. He didn't go far. Just around the corner to this doorway. I guess he sat down, made himself comfortable, and finished the bottle. He might have been asleep when he was killed. His body was still warm when we got here."

It was now nearly nine P.M.

Ralph and I began our questioning in the tavern where Wisniewski had purchased his whiskey. We learned that he had been in his forties and had no regular job. He occasionally picked up a little money by distributing advertising circulars or swamping in the neighborhood saloons. But mostly, it seemed, he preferred to prowl the nearby downtown section and panhandle. As far as anyone knew, he had no permanent address. Apparently in cold weather he rented a bed for the night in one of the area flop houses and in clement, he slept where-

ever the mood struck him and he would not be stepped or rained upon.

At nine-thirty, an officer found Ralph and me questioning some of Wisniewski's acquaintances and informed us that Chief Parkington would like to speak to us.

We went out to the radio in the squad car at the curb.

"Henry," the captain said, "How are you doing out there?"

"I predict that we will have the culprit or culpritness in custody within twenty-four hours."

"Good for you, Henry, but right now you might just be looking in the wrong place. I heard that your body's got the letter *A* painted on his forehead with lipstick?"

"We are reasonably certain that it is the latter *A*."

"Well, Henry, we just found another dead body. This time in the industrial valley. He was clobbered over the head too, but this one's got the letter *B* up there on his forehead."

Our industrial valley is the depression lining both sides of the river which divides the city into north and south. The traffic between the two halves flows over a series of viaducts.

Under the viaducts lies a region which has lost most of its factories and industries to the space and tax breaks of the countryside industrial parks. The plants remaining are obviously tired and near to expiring. They are randomly connected by short streets of

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grimy frame houses erected in the days when the hands walked to work and their days were governed by factory whistles and church bells. Most of the young and hopeful have long since migrated and one seldom saw children here anymore.

When we reached our destination, Ralph and I parked behind the assembled squad cars. A circle of silent slouching adults hovered at the entrance to an alley where the body had been found.

Ralph and I verified that the victim did indeed have the letter *B* upon his forehead and we also noted that he still clutched a red bandana-type handkerchief in his right hand, and that a quarter lay only a few inches from his left hand.

"Ah, yes," I said, reading the signs. "Just as he was passing the entrance to this alley, he felt a sneeze coming on or experienced the need to blow his nose. However along with his handkerchief, he also inadvertently pulled a quarter out of his pocket. It dropped to the sidewalk, and just as he stooped to pick it up, he was struck down."

The again-met night man from the coroner's office had much the same news. "He was hit just once, but that was enough. Same sort of weapon too, I'd guess."

Whatever that weapon had been, it had not been found.

Ralph and I began our questioning in the adjacent building,

Casey's Tavern. We learned that the victim was a James Leonardi, sixty-seven, single, and he had boarded in a house several buildings down the street. He had put in over fifty years in the local glove factory, but was now retired and drew social security.

Since his retirement, it had become his habit to wander over to Casey's Tavern in the evenings. He would nurse his beers, watch television, and talk. He would usually leave at about nine-thirty.

His body had been discovered by an elderly couple who had left the tavern only a few minutes after Leonardi. It appeared that the killer had lurked in the darkness of the alley and struck when Leonardi passed.

We learned that Leonardi's personality was of such a neutral nature that everyone agreed that he couldn't have had an enemy in the world. The keeper of his boarding house provided us with the information that during his working days, Leonardi had not been one of the saving kind, and so that today all that his three nephews — all now living in West Allis — could look forward to was sharing a five thousand dollar life insurance policy.

At a quarter to midnight, Ralph and I cut short our questioning and returned to headquarters to check out. I drove on to my apartment, consumed a sandwich and a large glass of Ovaltine and then went to bed.

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My phone rang at 8:45 the next morning and it was Captain Norwich, the day commander. "Henry, they tell me that last night you and Ralph got two corpses with the start of the alphabet on their foreheads?"

I nodded into the mouthpiece. "Correct, Captain. We are investigating the possibility of a connection between the two."

"Well, Henry, we got ourselves one more corpse. A man named Cornelius Van Leuggen. He was found dead in his study this morning with the letter C on his forehead. I want you and Ralph to go over there now and take charge of the investigation. You'll get overtime."

Ralph and I met at headquarters, checked out a car, and drove on to Lake Shore Drive, turning between the brick gateposts of the Van Leuggen home at a little past 9:30. We parked in the oval driveway before the house.

A uniformed officer led us down the hallway and into a cathedral-ceilinged study. A glance at the bookshelves revealed not a single paper book jacket. Leather was clearly in charge.

The coroner had found the Van Leuggen address sufficiently interesting to answer the call himself. "He was hit over the head three or four times. With what, I don't know. They tell me nobody's come up with a weapon yet."

We found Sergeants Handson and Whipperly in attendance and they had been informed by Captain Norwich that Ralph and I were to be given cooperation and cheerful deference.

"Who found the body?" I asked.

A tall, bald man stepped from the background. "I did, sir."

I regarded him keenly. "And who are you?"

"Winterset. The butler. Though actually no one really hires anyone just to butle anymore. I have other duties."

"What time did you find the body?"

"A bit before eight this morning, sir. When I opened the door to the study."

"Ah," I said, "The study door was closed? And you opened it? Why?"

"The general operation of this household is my province and during the course of my inspections I often find it necessary to open doors."

"After you found the body, did you touch anything?"

"Nothing at all, sir. It was obvious that Mr. Van Leuggen was beyond help. I simply re-closed the door, informed the family of his death, and then called the police."

"Was Mr. Van Leuggen a creature of habit? Did he, for instance, go to bed at the same time every night?"

"Yes, sir. He usually retired to his rooms before eleven."

"Good," I said, "Good." I rubbed my hands. "Ralph, this is my kind of a precise case. We are able to accurately approximate the time victim A died, since his body was still warmish when found. And we know that victim B met his death slightly after nine-thirty. And so, given time for the journey from the industrial valley to this address, I would say, with a high degree of confidence, that Van Leuggen was murdered between ten and eleven last evening."

Ralph looked at the coroner.

The coroner shrugged. "Why not? What I mean is that the longer a body is dead, the more you got to guess about the time of death."

Ralph nodded. "So couldn't Van Leuggen have gone to bed at eleven, like usual, but later heard a noise down here? Say like one A.M.? And he came down to investigate?"

"Ralph, Ralph," I said patiently. "Surely you saw that the corpse was fully clothed. This would indicate that he was killed *before* his regular time for retiring. Had he heard this speculative noise at one A.M., he would have been in his pajamas and probably also his bathrobe."

Ralph didn't want to let go. "Henry, a lot of people these days don't think it's necessary to own a bathrobe. Or wear pajamas. So he heard the noise, got dressed,

and came down to investigate."

I chuckled. "Ralph if *you* heard a suspicious noise downstairs and were sans bathrobe and pajamas, you might possibly slip into some clothing, but would you pause before a mirror to put on a superfluous necktie? And our corpse was wearing a perfectly obvious necktie."

Ralph was a gracious loser. "That was damn good thinking, Henry." Then he frowned and proceeded to move about the room, looking under lamp shades.

"The lights," he finally said. "Why aren't the lights on? The desk lamp? Or at least one of the others?"

"Ralph, why should the lamps be on? It's daylight."

"But it wasn't daylight last night, Henry. I don't think the victim was sitting there at his desk in the dark. And the murderer had to see what he was doing. So the lights should still be on, but they aren't. And the butler here says that he touched nothing."

I pondered. "Ralph, the victim could have just entered the study and been groping his way toward his desk lamp. But before he could turn it on, the murderer struck him down."

"Henry, in the *dark* the murderer struck *three* times? And got his target everytime?"

That was a bit difficult, but I came up with the obvious answer. "What guarantee do we have that the murderer struck only three

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times? There might have been twenty blows, seventeen of which were misses."

"But, Henry, would all of those misses be *clean* misses? Wouldn't at least some of them have struck Van Leuggen's shoulders, or his arms, or whatever? But all of the wounds are on one small head."

"Ralph, it might not have been *absolutely* dark in here last night. Perhaps there was moonlight streaming through those perfectly good French windows?" I appealed to the occupants of the room. "Does anyone remember if there was a full moon last night? Or at least gibbous?"

Sergeants Hanson and Whipperly had been listening to our deductive dialogue with obvious awe and Whipperly now dared to speak. "Maybe the murderer turned off the lights before he left."

Winterset interposed. "When I said that I touched nothing, I simply meant that I did not touch the body or its immediate environs. However, through force of habit and unconscious deference to the energy crunch — or possibly because I was in a state of shock — I might unthinkingly have gone about turning off lights."

I turned to Ralph. "You see, Ralph, there is a perfectly rational explanation for everything. There was no need for panic."

I re-directed to Winterset. "You mentioned that you informed the family of Mr. Van Leuggen's

death. Just who is this family?"

"Mr. Van Leuggen's two nephews and a niece. They are domiciled in this house, sir." He indicated two young men and a young woman quietly seated on a divan at the far end of the room staring at us.

I approached them. "I am Detective-Sergeant Henry S. Turnbuckle."

Ariadne Van Leuggen was a raven-haired girl in her mid-twenties with violet eyes behind owl's-eye shell glasses. The nephews seemed a few years older. Roscoe Van Leuggen wore a basically green plaid jacket, and Sigmund a solid blue. And that seemed to be their only point of difference.

Roscoe folded his plaid-sleeved arms over his chest and smiled. "Sigmund and I are twins."

I took Ralph aside. "I don't like this one bit."

"What don't you like one bit?"

"This twins business. Whenever there are twins, there's always hanky-panky. Switched identities and that sort of thing. If one of them gets killed, you never know which one it is."

I returned to Van Leuggen's survivors. "From the cut of your uncle's clothes, I would guess that he was a wealthy man?"

Adriadne agreed. "Millions."

"Ah," I said disarmingly, "And who stands to inherit these millions?"

"We three do," Adriadne said.

Sigmund smiled and now folded his blue-clad arms over his chest. "Not me. I'm disinherited."

Adriadne regarded him. "What for this time?"

"I had a fender-bender in Uncle's favorite Cadillac."

Ariadne quite correctly thought it necessary to explain. "I've been disinherited at least a half a dozen times and Sigmund and Roscoe at least twice that each. Uncle just loved to disinherit us. Said it kept us on our toes. At any given time, he just wasn't happy unless one of us was out of his will."

I addressed Sigmund. "You have been disinherited from millions, and yet you sit there with a smile on your face? Is there an explanation?"

He nodded happily. "Don't you see? That leaves me with no motive for killing Uncle Cornelius. But both Ariadne and Roscoe still have beauties."

Winterset had been staring at the ceiling and now decided to remind me of something. "I couldn't help but notice that there was the letter C, in lipstick, on Mr. Van Leuggen's forehead."

I studied him keenly. "What makes you so certain that it is the letter C? Why couldn't it be a representation of a new moon? Or possibly a handleless sickle?"

Winterset persisted. "I read in this morning's newspaper that two people were murdered last night. One was found with the letter A

upon his forehead, and the other with the letter B. And when I saw that tracing on Mr. Van Leuggen's forehead, I just assumed that it might be a C."

Ralph had been thinking. Now he spoke. "Rich man, poor man, beggar man, thief. Doctor, lawyer, Indian chief."

Naturally we all looked at him.

He colored a bit. "We've got Van Leuggen, who was certainly rich. And then there was Wisniewski, who was a panhandler. In other words, a beggar. And then there is Leonardi, who's on social security, and that's poor. So there it is. Rich man, poor man, beggar man, thief."

"What are you getting at, Ralph?" I asked, though suspecting.

"Henry, the murderer's next victim is going to be a thief."

I took Ralph out of earshot. "Doesn't it strike you that there is a certain redundancy involved here?"

"What redundancy?"

"Ralph, here our murderer has a perfectly good series going. A, B, C, D, E, F, and so on. Why must he also resort to rich man, poor man, beggar man, thief?"

"Maybe he just wants to flesh it out, Henry. Give it some class."

"No, Ralph. And besides, the sequence of your little nursery rhyme is rich man, poor man, beggar man, thief. It is not beggar man, poor man, rich man, etcetera."

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Ralph was disappointed. "You mean that the next victim won't be a thief?"

I began thinking inexorably. "Ralph, we have assumed that the three murders were identical, and yet there are significant differences."

"What significant differences?"

"Murders *A* and *B* were committed in relatively public places, i.e. the entrance to an alley and in a doorway. And in each case, just *one* blow was struck. And further, the time of death of each of the first two victims could be almost exactly determined. However was any of this true of the victim hereinafter identified as victim *C*?"

"I'm listening with an open mind, Henry."

"To commit the murder of victim *C*, the murderer had to invade the sanctity of private property. He had to kill his victim in the full glare of artificial light. And also, he struck not *one*, but *three* blows. Would this not suggest passion rather than cold-blooded murder?"

Ralph mulled the possibility. "Somebody in the house, besides the butler, read the morning papers and decided it might be the right time to get rid of Uncle Cornelius and put the blame on the alphabet murderer?"

"No, Ralph. Cornelius Van Leuggen was absolutely stone-cold dead when his body was

found, which indicates that he was killed long before the morning newspaper hit the breakfast table. Though we cannot fasten on the exact time of his demise just yet. We just assumed that he met his death between ten and eleven."

"We assumed?"

I chortled. "This all reminds me of *The Purloined Letter*."

"Everything does."

"What better place to hide a murder than among murders? In other words, is it not possible that our killer had one quite legitimate motive for killing one of his victims? The other two were simply thrown in as a cover-up."

Ralph gave that a try. "You mean our murderer killed Wisniewski and then the other two to cover up?"

"No, Ralph. Who would go through all of that elaboration just to cover up the murder of a beggar? No, we must look for the *large* motive. And that usually is money, isn't it? Which brings us to Van Leuggen."

"Victim *C*?"

"Ralph, just because the murderer so thoughtfully labeled his victims *A*, *B*, and *C*, does not necessarily mean that he killed them in that order. Couldn't the sequence have been *BAC*, or *ACB*, or more likely *CAB*?"

Ralph waited to be persuaded.

"Ralph, *all* three victims were killed on the *same* night. Why this unseemly haste? This suggests desperation rather than intelligent

pre-planning, does it not? If you cold-bloodedly decide to hide your murder in a series of murders, wouldn't you space out those murders? Possibly over a week or two? This would allow time for the police and the public to adjust to the idea that a Jack-the-Ripper style killer is on the prowl. But *all* of them were killed in *one* night."

"All right, Henry, what does that suggest?"

"It suggests that victim *C* was killed *first*. In the height of some lethal emotion. And our murderer, realizing that he would most certainly be regarded as a prime suspect, decided that his only hope of getting away with it was to make it *seem* like the death was just one of a series of murders by an irrationally motivated madman. After all, he might as well be hanged for a sheep as for a lamb. So he scrawled the letter *C* upon his victim's forehead, and then he went out and murdered *A* and *B*.

I had the room emptied of all but official personnel and then directed the fingerprint men to dust the implements beside the fireplace. Especially the poker.

I explained to Ralph. "If *C* was murdered first, and in this room, and in the heat of some passion, is it not likely that the murderer would grab the first weapon handy? And what is more handy in the study of a wealthy home, than a fireplace poker? And remember the nature of the

wounds. All of them could possibly be, and probably were, inflicted by a fireplace poker."

"Henry, do you really expect to find the murderer's fingerprints on the fireplace poker?"

"Of course not, Ralph. Actually I expect to find no fingerprints at all. Which, in itself, should be suspicious, should it not?"

When the fingerprint man finished, he brought us the news. "There are prints on everything, Henry, including the poker. And all of them belong to the victim."

"Well," I said, undaunted. "Our murderer is cleverer than we suspected. He realized that the police would routinely search for fingerprints and knew that if they found none whatsoever on the poker, it would immediately raise questions and suspicions. Therefore, after returning from murders *A* and *B*, he washed the blood from the poker and then wisely affixed victim *C*'s prints upon the weapon and returned it to the stand. Nevertheless, Ralph, I am convinced that we are indeed looking at the murder weapon."

I brooded for a moment. "Ralph, the murderer must strike again and very likely tonight. The sooner he gets the head and attention off murder *C*, the better for him. And his next victim would probably be a thief.

Ralph closed his eyes for a few seconds. "What converted you?"

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you deliver that nursery rime and your speculation about the next victim. I don't think he can resist the temptation. He undoubtedly thinks to himself why not make the next victim a thief? What would it hurt? And then doctor, lawyer, and Indian chief. His only problem is how is he going to find a *bona fide* thief? After all they don't go about with signs around their necks. Therefore we must provide him with a thief."

"And how are we going to do that, Henry?"

"I will have placed in this afternoon's newspaper, an item concerning one Kenelm Digby, a purse snatcher and petty thief. The paragraphs will indicate that once again he has been apprehended, but that, for the moment, he is out on bail. His address will be given and that address shall be my own."

Ralph sighed. "And you expect our murderer to find those paragraphs about Digby? Henry, we got an awfully big newspaper in this city and it has a lot of pages."

I was ahead of him, of course. "Ralph, obviously our murderer cannot resist reading about his own murders. Therefore I will arrange that the Digby item appear in the column next to that story. It is inevitable that his eye will stray slightly and he will exclaim, 'Ah, what have I here? A genuine thief?'"

"So you expect our murderer to

show up at your apartment tonight?"

I nodded. "Ralph, since you and I have conducted most of our significant speculation out of the hearing range of our suspects, our murderer is still under the impression that he can sell the murders as a series, one way or another, or both. He does not suspect that I have already out-witted him."

We returned to our suspects and questioned them further, but learned nothing of significance. All of them had spent the previous evening at home, and anyone of them could have slipped into the study to kill Uncle Cornelius.

When we departed the Van Leuggen estate, Ralph went home to take a nap, and I on to make my arrangements.

We met again at headquarters at 4 P.M. for our regular shift.

Ralph had some questions. "Suppose this murderer of yours doesn't come to your apartment? Suppose he just goes out and murders somebody you're not counting on. Like a chiropractor or a disco dancer?"

"I have taken precautions, Ralph. Sergeants Willard and Dorfmann have been stationed outside the Van Leuggen driveway, each in his own car. This should cover the twins situation, Ralph. Suppose that Roscoe, for instance leaves the house, but on a perfectly innocent journey. If I had but a single car out there, that would leave Sigmund free to roam

and ravage. No, Ralph, if both twins leave the house tonight and go in opposite directions, they shall be followed, wherever they go."

Ralph smiled. "Are you sure two cars are enough, Henry. Why not three?"

I cleared my throat. "I have considered that objectively, Ralph, and come to the conclusion that our third suspect is really too physically slight to be our murderer."

"Henry, nowadays small and frail young women use two hands to swing their tennis rackets. If the can swing rackets, they can swing pokers."

"But, Ralph, she simply isn't tall enough. All of the victims were struck on the top of the head. This would suggest a certain positive height on the part of the murderer to accomodate the overhead nature of the swing."

"Henry, none of the victims was standing erect when he was killed."

I dipped into re-call. Wisniewski had apparently been sitting in a doorway when killed and it appeared that Van Leuggen had been at his desk.

"Ralph," I said, "Upon further thought, I realize that it is just possible that I may have been wrong in my speculations about Leonardi. There are just too many unacceptable coincidences. Leonardi *just happened* to feel a sneeze coming on as he *just*

happened to be opposite the alley entrance. He *just happened* to pull out that quarter with his handkerchief, and he *just happened* to be in the process of picking it up when he was struck."

"All right, Henry, then let's kick out the just happens. But Leonardi's been drinking in Casey's Tavern, where it's cozy and warm. And he's been drinking beer, which makes a lot of people sweat. So when he leaves, he's still got some of this sweat on his forehead. In the cool air outside, he feels it and he doesn't want to get pneumonia of the forehead, so he pulls out his bandana."

"Ha," I said skeptically, "And the quarter *just happens* to be pulled out of his pocket too?"

"It could have happened that way, Henry. But let's just say that somewhere in that dark alley, our small murder person is lurking. And this murder person *tosses* a quarter out of the darkness onto the sidewalk to get Leonardi to bend down."

I laughed lightly. "Ralph, if you are walking on the sidewalk and suddenly a quarter flips out of the near-darkness and lands at your feet, surely a normal ocular reflex would catch the arc of that toss? Surely one's attention would be directed to the source of that arc. And surely one would be on one's alert — possibly even assuming a defensive stance — rather than mindlessly diving for the quarter."

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"Henry, suppose this murder person threw the quarter *behind* Leonardi? Where he wouldn't see that arc of yours? But Leonardi would *hear* the tinkle and he would turn, and he would see the quarter and he would think that he had just pulled it out of his pocket with the bandana, *or* that he had a hole in his pocket and the quarter had just dropped out. And so he would bend down to pick it up."

"Ralph, you have the wildest imagination."

Ralph beamed "Praise from the master."

He delayed our departure from headquarters by going to Captain Parkington and quite unnecessarily requesting that another car be dispatched immediately to the stakeout at the Van Leuggen home.

When we got to my apartment, I turned on the TV set to the educational channel just in time to catch a study on longevity in the Caucasus. An eagerly smiling native assured us that he was indeed 158 years old and that this was undoubtedly due to yogurt, heredity, a bland life, and, one suspected, foggy, foggy record keeping.

"All right," Ralph said, "So you think that one of the twins did it? But which one?"

I smiled. "Why, which one would you pick, Ralph?"

"It would have to be Roscoe."

"Why?"

"Sigmund doesn't have a motive. He's been disinherited."

"Ralph, Ralph," I chided. "There are other motives besides money. However, even assuming money, Sigmund only *appears* to be without a motive. Surely he will *contest* the will? And surely the fact that Uncle Cornelius made a hobby out of disinheriting his heirs-apparent would indicate to a sympathetic court that Sigmund just had the misfortune to be caught on a down-swing and that his uncle had never really intended the disinheritance to stick. I rather suspect that Sigmund will be granted his one-third share of the estate, especially since I doubt that his siblings would even think of seriously disputing his claim."

Ralph wondered for a moment. "Maybe all *three* of them are in on the killing?"

"No, Ralph. If that were true, surely they would have arranged to support each other with mutually interlocking alibis instead of having to resort to this serious business."

Ralph shrugged. "Well, how are you going to tell which twin is which, Henry? Especially if they're wearing different jackets tonight. Suppose they get cute and vague and decide to cover up for each other and not remember who is who? You could get your whole case thrown out of court."

I chuckled. "Ralph, I am

thoroughly prepared. It is a commonly known fact to a select few of us, that people always fold their arms across their chests the same way, i.e. right arm over the left, or left arm over the right. And I observed that Roscoe folds his right arm over his left, and Sigmund, just the opposite."

It was eight-thirty that evening before the buzzer to my apartment sounded.

I opened the door.

Ariadne Van Leuggen.

"Ah, ha!" she said, "Just as I suspected. It's a trap!"

Nevertheless she stepped into the room and closed the door behind her. "Am I too soon, or too late?"

"I'd guess just about in time," Ralph said.

"Miss Van Leuggen," I said sincerely, "Undoubtedly you have an honest and reasonable explanation for your presence here at this particular point in time?"

Of course she had. "Well, after you left, I just happened to look up your address in the phone book. Did you know that you are the only Turnbuckle in the entire metropolitan area?"

Ralph came to my defense. "But just mention his name in Sheboygan."

She continued. "And you, Henry S. Turnbuckle, live here at 777 Cranberry Blossom Lane. Well, anyway, this evening I picked up the newspaper and there in three long-winded para-

graphs I read about a purse snatcher who's out on bail and his address just happens to be 777 Cranberry Blossom Lane. And somehow that got me to thinking. After all, how often in one day, do you run across people who live at 777 Cranberry Blossom Lane? So I just had to come over here and find out what was cooking. One of the mail slots in the foyer has the name Kenelm Digby in suspiciously new lettering, but there is no Henry S. Turnbuckle. So I absolutely had to check it out."

She glanced about my living-room. "Are all those books yours?"

Ralph nodded for me. "He also goes to the public library and withdraws like crazy. Henry is the only detective ever to rush back into a burning building to rescue his library card."

That was years ago, but I still blush at the incident. If I'd known then how simple it was to obtain a duplicate, I could have saved my eyebrows.

The door buzzer sounded again.

I smiled triumphantly. "As soon as I ask our newest visitor to fold his arms, we will know who our murderer is."

I opened the door.

It was Winterset. The butler.

Damn.

As long as he was there, and had no satisfactory explanation for his presence, Ralph and I searched him. We found the fireplace poker up his right sleeve and a tube of

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lipstick in his left-hand pocket. Under the circumstance, and possibly my uncompromising glare, the culprit decided to confess.

He had been bilking the Van Leuggen household accounts for some fifteen years and had finally been found out. That even Van Leuggen had not only fired Winterset, but had decided to call the police.

At which point, Winterset had panicked, seized the poker, and killed his employer.

Winterset's first instinct had been to flee. However he was stayed by a loathing to depart penniless. After all, he had invested his ill-gotten gains in burgeoning real estate, and it would take a bit of time to convert those holdings into portable cash.

He knew that Cornelius Van Leuggen's heirs would, of course, be prime suspects. However would the police investigation center only them? Very likely not. After all, as many wealthy men seem to be killed by their servants, as by their heirs.

Therefore the murder would have to be made to appear as though it had been committed by an intruder. A total stranger. But again, that was rather weak unless ...

Why not make this murder simply one of a series? And why not bury Van Leuggen's murder in the *middle* of that series, where it would receive the least con-

centrated attention?

So he had pocketed a tube of lipstick which Ariadne had forgotten on her uncle's desk, turned out the lights of the study to forestall an untimely discovery of the body, and then gone out looking for victims *A* and *B*. After all, one might as well be hanged for a sheep as for a lamb.

As I had so clearly deduced, victim *B*, Leonardi, had come out of the tavern, felt a sneeze coming on, and in the quick-draw for his handkerchief, had also pulled a quarter from his pocket. He had been in the process of retrieving the coin when Winterset struck.

Murders *A* and *B* accomplished, Winterset had returned to the Van Leuggen study, verified that the body had still not been discovered, and then scrawled the letter *C* on the victim's forehead.

When Winterset left the room again, he automatically turned out the lights. When Ralph brought up the point, Winterset had realized that his fingerprints were certainly on the light switches, and he quickly came up with a suitable explanation for their presence.

Winterset had intended to kill at least three times more, so that the death of Van Leuggen would be neatly book-ended between the others.

When Ralph tendered his rich man, poor man, nursery rhyme theory and his speculation that the murderer's next victim would be a thief, Winterset had filed that

possibility in the back of his mind. And while reading of the murders in the evening newspaper, he had, of course, noted my item concerning Kenelm Digby, and had thought, *Well, why not?*

We took Winterset to headquarters for booking and when the paperwork was done, Ariadne was still with us, lost in admiration at my efficiency.

I took her and Ralph to a new bar in the neighborhood and, for my part, I ordered a glass of sherry.

The bartender scratched his head, searched the back bar and then opened a trap door in the floor and descended into what I supposed was a cellar storage area.

"Ariadne," I said, "Twins and a butler in the same case are a little too much."

The bartender wiped up some damp spots on the bar in front of me.

I stared at him. "Didn't you just go down into the cellar?" I looked at the still open trap door. "I mean, aren't you down there right now?"

He smiled. "That's my brother, Albert. I'm Bernie."

I braced myself. "Twins?"

"Triplets. That's our brother Chester at the sink washing glasses."

When Albert ascended from the depths with the screw-cap bottle, I had him fill my glass all the way to the top. ●

IMPORTANT NOTICE TO MIKE SHAYNE MYSTERY MAGAZINE SUBSCRIBERS

In September 1979 a severe fire at the plant which prints MSMM destroyed subscriber mailing labels and a large quantity of the October 1979 issue. This is why your subscriber's copy was late in getting to you. Unfortunately, because of this setback, the November issue, normally sent out early in October, was also late in many instances. We'd like to thank you for bearing with us during that hectic period and hope that you'll accept our sincere apologies for the delay.

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